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## THE DOUAY VERSION

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The conditions that provoked the publication of the Douay Bible were the significant events in England of the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries inclusive. During that period the Reformers and their forerunners published various English versions to meet the demand for the Bible in the vernacular. By the latter part of the sixteenth century it was becoming evident that the Bible was to be read by the masses. But these Protestant editions were frequently accompanied by notes often of a controversial nature. The situation finally drove the Romanists into competition. If the people would have the Bible, it was obviously better that it should be one the translation and notes of which would not include sentiments at variance with the Roman belief and practice.

Now the state of affairs that had developed during the reign of Elizabeth had placed the Catholics in a position very similar to that of the Protestants during the reign of Mary. Many found themselves exiles. Among them was one William Allen, scholar and educator, through whose efforts an English Catholic college was established at Douay, Flanders, in 1568. As a result of political difficulties the institution was moved to Rheims in 1578, but moved back to Douay in 1593. Allen recognized the inconsistency of the popular demand for the Scriptures and wisely made extensive and careful preparation for yielding to it. A scholar of high rank, he associated with himself in the undertaking four other eminent Oxford men: Gregory Martin, reputedly the greatest Hebraist and Greek scholar of his day, Richard Bristow, Dr. Reynolds, and Dr. Worthington. The results of the labors of these five men were the publication of the New Testament with notes by Allen and Bristow at Rheims in 1582, and of the Old Testament with notes by Worthington at Douay in 1609. To the work thus published in

two parts have been applied two designations—the Rheims and Douay Version of the Bible, or the Douay Bible.

As indicated in the preface to the Rheims New Testament, the purpose of the work was to grant the “desires of many devout persons” and protect the faithful from being led astray by erroneous and corrupt versions so often accompanied by heretical interpretations. A sentiment somewhat similar was expressed in the preface to the Old Testament. The translators made it plain, however, that, so far as their own opinion was concerned, translations in themselves were not desirable.

When the men began their work, Jerome’s Bible, the Latin Vulgate, had already been declared by the Council of Trent (1546) to be the authorized version of the Roman Catholic church. The particular edition of which such authorization should be predicated had not been specified by the Council but left to the decision of the pope. The text that eventually became official was the final edition of the revision made under Clement VIII. This was brought out in 1598 and has since been known as the Sixtine or Clementine Vulgate. The translators used the Vulgate as the basis of their work, in particular a text published at Louvain, but a comparison of the date of the publication of the Rheims New Testament (1582) with that of the Clementine edition, just quoted, indicates at a glance that the text of the former could not have been identical with that of the latter. Keeping in mind the position of unparalleled importance demanded by Catholics for the Clementine Vulgate, the question arises, How can Romanists consistently justify authenticated use of a version not based upon that edition? However, one modifies one’s tendency to be adversely critical when one recalls that William Allen, conspicuously instrumental in determining the basic text for the Rheims Testament, was also one of the editors of the Clementine Vulgate. So far as the Old Testament is concerned, before it was published at all it was revised by the Standard Vulgate. So much for the primary basis of the Douay Bible. Secondary sources of assistance were the original Greek text, a parallel Latin-English Testament brought out by Coverdale, and Wycliffe’s and Tyndale’s versions. In view of the circumstances that provoked the Douay, the use of the last three

is certainly interesting. Why not interpret it as an evidence of broad-minded earnestness on the part of the translators?

The text produced, in spite of many undesirable features, reflected the conscientious effort of undeniable scholars. Necessity for change there undoubtedly was, but it is to be attributed to ecclesiastical prejudice rather than to a deplorable lack of scholarship. As a whole there was a slavish adherence to the Latin, so extreme in fact that it resulted at times in absolutely unintelligible phraseology. An illustration from each Testament will suffice—Ps. 57:10: “Before your thorns did understand the old briar: as living so in wrath he swalloweth them”; Rom. 9:28: “For consummating a word and abridging it in equity: because a word abridged shall our Lord make upon the earth.” Again, at times the Douay translators, because of an undue veneration for the Vulgate apparently, refused to profit by opportunities of correction that a comparison of the Hebrew and Greek texts would have made possible. Consequently, passages were retained in which a meaning quite different from the original was presented. In some cases a controversial bias seems to be evidenced by such retention: Gen. 3:15 was rendered, “*She* shall bruise thy head.” This was an ultra-literal translation from the Latin, justified by neither the Hebrew nor the Greek. The Protestant Authorized Version gives the masculine in place of the feminine pronoun. On the basis of the gender of the pronoun however the Catholics had derived a deal of defense for the worship of the Virgin Mary. This biblical support of their doctrine the translators would not relinquish. Incidentally the Protestant Genevan Version does not lack evidence of a corresponding prejudice. This same exaggerated regard for the text led at times to what was almost a transliteration instead of a translation—Matt. 6:11: “supersubstantiale” is rendered “supersubstantial” where the Protestant versions give us “daily” bread. The net result was a style that later was characterized by the great Catholic scholar Geddes as a “literal and barbarous translation from the Vulgate.”

The writer has wondered whether the deficiencies in the translation could not be traced in part to the attitude of the translators toward their work. Tyndale, for instance, entered upon his labors

inspired by a passion to meet human need. His main object was not the preservation of a book as a book, nor the conservation of ecclesiastical traditions, nor the upholding of a hierarchy, but a contribution whereby to enrich life. Scholarly, possessing a genius for language, infused with a love for message and people alike, he produced a style that to this day provides the pattern for all prose style, unsurpassed in its musical qualities, its dignity, its sober earnestness, its simplicity and lucidity, its power of appeal to all classes. In the great contrast that the Rheims-Douay version presented to Tyndale's translation one may detect perhaps, as cause thereof, the attitude of the translator to his work in each case. Tyndale's version was a spontaneous response to meet need; the work of the Douay scholars was a reluctant concession to an uncontrollable demand.

With all its defects, however, the preservation of many words of Latin derivation in English translation is to be credited to the Douay version. Among such words are "impenitent" (Rom. 2:5); "propitiation" (3:25); "expectation" (8:19); "contribution" (15:26); "rejected" (I Tim. 4:4). Whole phrases and sentences could be cited from Protestant Authorized and Revised versions which come direct from the Douay.

The text of the whole Douay Bible was supplemented by extensive notes of a controversial nature. The preface of the New Testament included along with the expression of the purpose of the translators some severe criticisms of Protestant versions. The inadequacy and incorrectness of the translation in some places, in conjunction with the nature of comments and notes, brought forth a storm of protest from the Protestants but apparently with little effect. Meanwhile revised editions of the Douay Bible appeared in rapid succession, the process being punctuated at intervals by new Catholic translations, due in part to Romanist criticisms similar to that expressed by an Irish priest named Nary, who wrote of the Douay Bible: "The language is so old, the words so obsolete, the orthography so bad, and the translation so literal that in a number of places it is unintelligible."

In the middle of the eighteenth century Richard Challoner, Douay scholar and bishop of London, brought out his famous

revisions: that of the Rheims edition in 1749, compared with the authorized Clementine edition; and the whole Bible in 1750. His work included an extensive revision of the notes, and so far as the text is concerned his efforts resulted in what was almost a new translation much like the Protestant Authorized.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Challoner's purpose was the production of a text intelligible to his readers, and beyond question, in importance among all the Catholic translations, it has taken rank second to the Douay only.

Next in extensiveness of circulation have been the Irish texts of a priest named Bernard MacMahon and Archbishop Troy of Dublin (1783-91); that of the latter was designated "fifth edition." Matthew Carey of Philadelphia brought out in 1790 the 1750 edition of Challoner, and in 1805 Troy's 1791 "fifth edition."

The multiplication of texts continued, inevitably resulting in much confusion. To modify it, a liberal element in the Catholic church began to advocate attempts to bring Catholic and Protestant versions into accord. But this situation provoked more revisions on the part of the conservative element. The Challoner Old Testament and the Rheims New Testament usually constituted the bases of these revisions. One issued with the approval of Archbishop Murray of Dublin (1815) has become prominent; also another with Cardinal Wiseman's sanction (1847). In 1862 Archbishop Kenrick of Philadelphia brought out an excellent version of the Bible. The Old Testament was the product of a scholarly comparison of the Hebrew with the Vulgate; the New Testament translation, a careful revision of the Rheims New Testament compared with a good translation of the Gospels by Lingard, 1836. But so great was the popular veneration for the Challoner-

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Newman wrote of it: "Looking at Dr. Challoner's labors on the New Testament as a whole we may pronounce that they issue in little short of a new translation. They can as little be said to be made on the basis of the Douay as on the basis of the Protestant Version. Of course there must be a resemblance between any two Catholic versions whatever, because they are both translations of the same Vulgate. But this connection between the Douay and Challoner being allowed for, Challoner's Version is even nearer to the Protestant than it is to the Douay. . . . It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that at this day the Douay Testament no longer exists as a received version of the Authorized Vulgate." Cardinal Wiseman may also be quoted: "To call it any longer the Douay or Rhemish Version is an abuse of terms. It has been altered and modified till scarcely any verse remains as originally published."

Douay that Kenrick's work, acceptable as it is from a scholarly point of view, failed to gain any real circulation. Today it is out of print. In 1899 a revision of the Challoner-Douay was brought out with the approval of Cardinal Gibbons. Since it is almost an exact reproduction of Challoner, one is at a loss to know how to interpret the statement that one finds in the preface, "This is an accurate reprint of the Rheims and Douay Edition with Dr. Challoner's Notes."

In view of all these versions and revisions, who then shall say which shall constitute the authentic one? Many and diverse are those that have been in general and permitted circulation. Moreover, the most common editions usually bear, not the name of their original reviser, but rather that of some subsequent editor or of the archbishop who stamped them with his approval, so that it is difficult to determine the origin of the text quoted. Roughly speaking, however, some form of the Challoner Old Testament is commonly used among English-speaking Catholics. Regarding the New Testament, apparently there is no *textus receptus* of the Rheims Version. The tendency seems to be to follow Challoner in Ireland, and Challoner and Troy in England and America. Many authentic editions there are, but not one authorized one. The Catholic church knows only one authorized Bible and that is the Clementine Vulgate of 1598. The policy of the Holy See appears to have been and to continue to be to allow much independence to various Catholics in local authority, and tradition has so authenticated the Douay Bible to the public at large that Catholic translators who do not in some way, at least nominally, connect their work with the Douay Bible apparently cannot win any permanent circulation for it.

In closing we may note that through the influence of the Wycliffe and Tyndale versions on the Rheims-Douay, of the Rheims-Douay on the Authorized and Revised Protestant editions, of the Protestant Authorized upon the modern Challoner, the passing of time marks a conspicuous tendency in the direction of an approximately similar text. In fact, today the writer knows of Protestant theological students who have used the Gibbons Challoner-Douay version unconscious of the fact that it was not a familiar Protestant text.

When one compares the situation that produced the Douay Bible with the present situation that makes possible a practical conformity of texts presented by standard English Catholic and English Protestant versions, one realizes that with the march of centuries men of diverse faiths are coming more and more to emphasize their common ties as befitteh brotherhood.

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